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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

APRIL 1st, 1852.

NOTICE.

THE list of Mechanics' and Literary Institutions, Lyceums, &c., to which the *Musical Times* is regularly posted gratis, for the use of their reading rooms, has been considerably enlarged, and now includes all of which we have been able to discover the names. To those who this month receive our work for the first time, we would respectfully request that it be carefully filed, after use in their reading room, as the music pages only are stereotyped, and the rest of the paper is not to be purchased after the first impression. We would also request that the name of our work be inserted in the list of periodicals to be seen at their institution; and, although the paper will be posted each month without any *claim* being made, yet we shall never disdain payment from those rich institutions who may think it right to help us in the cause we have at heart, viz., the diffusion of good musical knowledge.

ENGLISH GLEE & MADRIGAL COMPOSERS.

No. V.

Contributed by E. HOLMES, Author of the "Life of Mozart."

NOTWITHSTANDING the respectable amount of composition of native growth accumulated by the English in the madrigal style, the history of our activity in these works occupies but a brief space, extending scarcely beyond a period of thirty years. After 1620, few collections of madrigals were published. The court of James I. by exhibiting a taste for masques and dramatic representations, set off by machinery, scenery, and decorations, turned the thoughts of musicians into a new direction. To these royal amusements artists of various kinds contributed, and Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones united their powers with the best composers of the day.

So complete a change was the cause of much regret and dissatisfaction. From the perfection of the madrigal style to the first feeble step in opera, seemed so great a falling off in point of taste, that composers could not conceal their discontent. The art was in a state of transition. Our English masters did not see the good ultimately to result from the gradual perfection of

the lyric drama, and they naturally enough expressed their complaints at a decay of patronage in their own peculiar faculty, which left them to contend as they could with the practical difficulties of life.

It has been already remarked that it is uncertain who are the original proprietors and inventors of the chief subjects of counterpoint which extend from the madrigal age to the middle of the last century. Conceding to the Italians their full share of merit as our models, we must yet look to the madrigal age of England for the foundation of that solid taste in secular, as well as in church music, which distinguishes our country at the present day from the whole continent.

This style of composition served its purpose, and was discontinued; but that which was produced in its first freshness possesses still a charm unfading and undiminished by years. The first efforts of music as a thing of delight, formed of parts purely vocal, and free from those harsh intervals which are barbarisms of science in the ecclesiastical style—will always be objects of interest to the enlightened amateur. The elevation of music through a closer union with poetry, and therefore with new sentiments and passions to express, derived from the romance of life, is an advantage which we owe to the madrigal. To this style, also, instrumental music has its obligations, and everything secular which up to the present day we admire abstractedly, and on its own grounds, as a work of art. Up to this time our composers had borrowed inspiration from the cathedral and from their religious musings—but in entering the high style of secular composition, their genius opened a wider flight and took a more discursive range.

Orlando Gibbons, though not one of the most voluminous authors of secular music, is an honored contributor to our madrigal collections. He published, in 1612, a set of madrigals in five parts for voices and viols. His "Silver Swan" is still a most deservedly-admired work on account of the beauty of the melody, the fine progressions of its parts, and its elegant harmonious cadences. The simplicity and transparent beauty of such a composition, please the more from contrast with the general elaboration of style in the church music of our "English Palestrina," as displayed in the "Hosanna" and some other of his full anthems. Orlando Gibbons exercised his pen in more various efforts than perhaps any contemporary musician. From the secular diversions of the church composer we are enabled to gain a clue to his social character. This great musician amused himself, as did some others, by putting harmony to the London cries of his time. If these could be brought forward in some music lecture, they

would afford curious illustrations of ancient customs and manners in the metropolis.

Of the private enjoyments and extra-official recreations of such a man, for example, as Tallis, it is difficult to form an idea; our associations with him being entirely coloured by the cloistral and monastic gravity of his music: yet a passage quoted by Hawkins from the *Nugæ Antiquæ* even enables us to see a laugh on the grim visage of master Tallis:—

In a letter from Sir John Harrington to the Lord Treasurer Burleigh, mention is made of certain old monkish rhymes, called "The Blacke Saunctus, or Monkes Hymn to Saunt Satan." The father of Sir John Harrington, who had married a natural daughter of Henry VIII., named Esther, and was very well skilled in music, having learned it, as the letter says, in the fellowship of good maister Tallis, set this hymn to music in a canon of three parts, and King Henry was used in pleasant mood to sing it.

This slight tradition helps us to form an idea of the social life of our ancestors, and displays the character of the professional recreations of our greatest masters, who are always the pleasanter the nearer they approach us on the common ground of humanity.

It is as a vocal composer alone, and in the elegance and scientific construction of his parts, that Orlando Gibbons surpassed his age; in instrumental music he did not get beyond the inartificial style of his contemporaries. Burney can hardly repress surprise that "even Orlando Gibbons knew nothing of the bow." The addition of viols to the voices was probably to aid intonation in long and elaborate works. For though madrigals are generally constructed of diatonic intervals and passages easy to sing, some few of them have those diminished intervals and that peculiar harmony in which the 3rd is joined with the 4th and 5th—combinations almost peculiar to the full anthem of the Purcell era—very difficult to intone without accompaniment, and by some called harsh and untunable, however accurately sung. There is a curiosity of this kind in the *Oriana* volume, by Thomas Hunt. The intonation of this composition unaccompanied would be no slight test of accuracy in the modern training of the ear, and in part-reading. Hence the employment of viols by our ancestors for unisonous accompaniment.

Gibbons also wrote lessons for the virginal, and seemed to be of opinion, with many of his contemporaries, that there was much to do in music. The efforts of the madrigal writers beyond their own craft are indeed curious. One of them, Mundy, a good contrapuntist, who exhibits in the *Oriana* volume, and in Queen Elizabeth's virginal book, attempted to depict a storm, or pastoral symphony of some kind, in which he took up a good idea at least two hundred years before the time was ripe for its execution. Beethoven

finished the work for him; but let us not the less honor the aspiring ambition of Mundy.

It was in the time of Gibbons that the attempt was made to give music a more important academical standing; and he is so far connected with the music lecture, founded at Oxford, by Dr. Heather, that he wrote the exercise by which that personage gained his degree. It is not known whether Heather was a practical composer or not. In his portrait he is represented with the "*Musica Transalpina*" under his arm, to denote at least an interest in, and taste for, the art. Camden, the historian, and master of Westminster school, occupied the same house in Westminster with Heather. They were singular musical friends—Camden had been brought up in the choir at Magdalen College, Oxford, and Heather was a gentleman of the Royal Chapel. Both lived in friendship with Gibbons; and the only thing which affects the character of Heather with posterity, is, that he obtained his degree surreptitiously—his exercise being no other than the eight-part anthem, "O clap your hands," published in Boyce's Cathedral Music with the name of the right composer, Orlando Gibbons.

This ornament of English art reposes in the Cathedral at Canterbury. Having been summoned to this city to attend the solemnity of the marriage of Charles I. and Henrietta of France, he was seized with the small pox, which suddenly carried him off. Ellis Gibbons, brother of Orlando, has two fine madrigals in *Oriana*—but he was chiefly celebrated as an organist, which appointment he held at Salisbury Cathedral. Edward, another brother, organist of Bristol, educated the famous Matthew Lock; and about this time madrigal composition greatly declined.

"The defects in point of melody," says Hawkins, "under which the music of this country so long laboured, may justly be ascribed to the preference given to harmony, that is to madrigals and fantasias for viols, in five or six parts. * * The art of singing had never been cultivated in England, with a view to the improvement of the voice, or the calling forth those powers of expression and execution, of which we at this time know it is capable."

The efforts of the first composers of the music for masques, namely—Lanieri, Coperario, Campion, &c., show how difficult melody was to find. Italy was again in advance, and sent us the best examples of air and recitative; and though many of our composers adopted "the Italian vein," others shortly opposed it and thought it corrupting, softening, effeminate. Henry Lawes, Milton's friend, was one of these opponents. He even set the index of an Italian book to music, ridiculing therein the new fangled taste, and showing how little meaning its admirers attached to sound. Lawes himself, however, was happier in musical decla-

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mation than in melody. Milton had been offended by a want of attention to prosody in our composers; but Lawes does not "scan:"

With Midas' ears confounding short and long.

Yet notwithstanding this important lyrical qualification, the curious have looked in vain to discover real melody in the compositions of Lawes.

The advance of melody thinned the ranks of aspirants to composition; for melody, that simple, natural, and apparently easy part of music, is the test of genius. Throughout the madrigal era we find clusters of English names unknown in our church books: of some who have made whole sets of madrigals, and others who owe their reputation to one successful effort; but from the age of Lock, to Purcell and Arne, the attention is not divided by a multitude of claims, for each period seems to be under the dominion of the prevailing master-spirit.

Some madrigals themselves show the growing taste for a simple tune, and are rather popular as harmonised airs than on account of the science and skill shown in the construction of their parts. Of this kind we have specimens still much admired, by Ford, Dowland, Edwards, and others. These form the most attractive exercises for beginners in part singing. But the more elaborate contrapuntal madrigals exist in such profusion as to offer incessant varieties of part writing. They are still quite fresh, and afford the best materials for the education of the modern choir.

Of other good music belonging to the madrigal period, save that of the church, we can trust only to the traditions of the excellence of our extempore organists. The concert music heard even by potentates seems to have been valued chiefly for its noise. Lord Bacon's advice touching music, is "let it be loud and sharp." Henry VIII. was entertained at a masque in Wolsey's palace at Whitehall, with a concert of drums and fifes. One of the chroniclers has recorded that the king, giving an entertainment, borrowed of the Cardinal a trombone player, who, to gratify his royal admirer, blew so strenuously, that he expired in two days. When Queen Elizabeth dined, Her Majesty's band played during the repast, and "twelve trumpets, two kettle-drums, with fifes, cornets, and side drums, made the hall ring for half an hour together." After such a din it is surprising that the Queen could appreciate the minute sound of her virginals, or of that antique violin called the polyphant, on which she is also said to have performed solos in the first position.

Among the public at large, the Puritans were not ashamed to confess their little value for music. The tone of their modest request to Parliament is extremely odd and amusing. They prayed

"that all cathedral churches may be put down, where the service of God is grievously abused by piping with organs, singing, ringing and trowling of psalms from one side of the choir to the other, with the squeaking of chanting choristers, &c."

With such an anti-musical public, with such contest of parties and fluctuating tastes among musicians themselves, we may imagine what professional life must have been between the madrigal period and the establishment of Opera. The malcontents in church music it is well known succeeded in putting a stop to it for several years—the routine of the cathedral service was well nigh forgotten, when Mr. Edward Low, an old collegiate organist, at the Restoration put forth a tract containing "plain and easy directions" for its performance. Meantime the most valuable seminary of English art, which hitherto the cathedral had been, was broken up. The musician turned adrift "to seek a livelihood by teaching vocal and instrumental music in private families, met with but a cold reception—for the fanaticism of the times led many to think music an unchristian recreation, and that no singing but the singing of David's psalms was to be tolerated in a church that pretended to be forming itself into the most perfect model of primitive sanctity."

But in the midst of the dreary suspension of public amusements during the Commonwealth, music was quietly gaining strength, and preparing to exhibit herself with new attractions and blandishments. Recitative, vocal melody,—which Waller somewhere calls "gargling a song in the throat,"—and picturesque instrumental effects, were all attempted with success at Davenant's theatre, and the Republican government, though it could not openly encourage such performances, did not at the least obstruct them. Cromwell himself was fond of organ music, as appears by an anecdote told by Thomas Warton in his observations on the "Fairly Queen" of Spencer:—

In the grand rebellion, when the organ in Magdalen College, in Oxford, among others, was taken down, he ordered it to be carefully conveyed to Hampton Court, where it was placed in the great gallery, and one of his favorite amusements was to be entertained with this instrument at leisure hours. It remained there till the Restoration, when it was returned to its original owners, and was the same that remained in the choir of that college till within these last thirty years.

The history of these times is of endless interest. Old Dr. Ben. Rogers, out of employ, and living in a cottage, in New College-lane, Oxford, consoled himself that he had warmed the hearts of the Dutch with his music. Lord Hollis, our ambassador, saw several who toasted "Mynheer Rogers of England in a great rummer of wine." Such sentimental success is still the chief reward of the composer.

To be continued.